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Avoid culture of fear, bad for nation-building

THE "Listen, listen, listen" video has gone viral. It shows K.S. Bawani, a Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) student, speaking and was stopped mid-way by Sharifah Zohra Jasbeen' Syed Shah



Saifuddin

the parody by Mat Luthfi. Taken together, all these will amount to about five million times. But there are dozens of other videos too. Also, there are hundreds of thousands of comments in Facebook, Twitter, blogs, etc. And people talk about it everywhere.

Some of the viewers also watch other videos and films that carry the same kind of sentiment. Examples are, 2+2=5 and 3 Idiots. I was informed of the video on Jan 14.

I viewed it, posted comments on my Facebook and Twitter, and spoke to Bawani on the phone. On Jan 18, I met-up with her in Bangsar. I found her as someone passionate and polite.

As I have stated elsewhere, Sharifah should have allowed Bawani to finish speaking. Even if she wanted to stop her, there are better ways of doing it.

After that, Sharifah may disagree with her, but should have replied

wisely. For example, she should not infer that Bawani should leave this country or UUM.

Sharifah should, not have lectured her in a very talking down, condescending and patronising way. The Quran, an-Nahl:125, advises us to call people with wisdom, good teachings and debate in the best of ways.

Why is it that this incident became viral? The main reason is because many can relate to Bawani. Many have encountered similar, if not worse, incidents, either to themselves, family members or friends, or saw it happen to people, or heard stories from people; in schools, universities, work places, and, to quote Jurgen Habermas, in "public sphere(s)".

This is attributed to what is termed by Frank Furedi as "culture of fear", which unfortunately, today, resonates all too well with peoples' experiences and became a tangible reality that shapes their daily life. I am not saying that we

Miskin, president of Suara Wanita 1Malaysia (SW1M), by taking away the microphone. This was followed by Sharifah berating Bawani.

This incident took place during a forum at UUM which was attended by about 2,300 students in December last year.

To date, videos of the incident are already viewed about 1.5 million times. Besides that, there are other videos on the incident available on YouTube.

If we take into account only those that have been viewed more than one million times, there are, for example, the remix by Yurimusicwong and Namewee, and

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should not have any fear at all. It is only human to fear something. But here, I am talking about fear that is manufactured or purposely created.

Examples are, some people are discouraged from speaking up because of fear of being accused as a busy body or maverick by their peers or neighbours. Because suggestions are sometimes mistaken as criticisms, some choose to play safe and keep honest opinions only to themselves.

Some people – the alarmists – including some politicians, officials and professionals, deploy fear to promote their cause. This is done through draconian laws and regulations, or by regressively interpreting rules and procedures, or by speculating impending risks and catastrophes.

Some politicians fear of not being selected or appointed to certain positions, or being sidelined or marginalised from the mainstream. This is oligarchic or patronised politics, which is more restrictive than

the imperfect party and parliamentary democracy.

Some students do not ask question or argue, because they fear some teachers, lectures and officials who do not like those who are talkative or opinionated. They fear for their exam result, team selection, positional appointment, programme and budget approval, or stay in hostel. Some youths fear being belittled, labelled or embarrassed by some adults.

But because these cases were not reported, or even if reported but were swept under the carpet, and more importantly, they were not documented, so, they were not highlighted and addressed accordingly.

Along the way, many have been unjustly punished. As stated by Daniel Teoh, "How many have been scolded, yelled at, humiliated, disciplined, and processed out from the system, our system?"

In Bawani's case, it was filmed. So, everyone who were once mis-

treated, are now speaking to the world, "Please listen to us!"

I concur with Furedi, that in slow and often imperceptible ways, our life is influenced by the prevailing culture of fear. Children and youths are the first to suffer. As far as they are concerned, there are so many "No" and so little "Yes".

The culture of fear is bad for nation building. It has the effect of undermining the pursuit of knowledge, education, thoughts and moral reasoning; the spirit of exploration and experimentation, and of creativity and innovation; the meaning of democracy, freedom, human rights and justice; and the realisation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak's progressive transformation programmes.

So, let's rebel against the culture of fear!

● Datuk Saifuddin Abdullah is the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and BN MP for Temerloh.